

BE TEACHABLE

In the early 90's, Jim Roy, our youth pastor and I were mentoring a young man in a pastoral internship. We were teaching him how to study Scripture, how to compose a Bible lesson and then how to teach a Bible lesson. We videotaped him teaching his lesson and then met with him to review both the content and presentation of his lesson. About 30 minutes into the process we called it quits. He literally rejected every critique we attempted to make of his teaching. He was defensive and insisted that everything he said and did needed to be said and done.

To give perspective, Jim Roy is a seminary trained teacher who, at that point in his life, had years of experience teaching the Bible to the youth of Grace Church. He is a very gifted communicator. I, too, am a seminary trained teacher, and though I was in the first couple years of my ministry here at Grace, I had hundreds of hours of experience composing Bible lessons and teaching Bible lessons. My point is that we were qualified to critique both the content and presentation of this young brother's Bible lesson. But more than that, we wanted to help our young brother mature in his ministry knowledge and skills; we were for him, not against him!

Because of his pride this young brother was unteachable. He squandered an incredible opportunity because he was completely unteachable. Not long after this experience, we mutually ended his internship. This was a terribly sad experience to me for what this young man forfeited.

I began running long distance as a freshman in high school. A week before school began we started cross country workouts. I was decked out in my brand new, Righetti Warrior gold shorts and my blue suede Adidas shoes. On one of our first runs, Coach Haversak came alongside me and told me to lift my head and look at the horizon and to loosen my hands. Up to that point my running posture was head down counting the cracks in the sidewalk with my hands in a fist. Though it took some time and real effort to establish this new posture, it was so worth it. It changed my whole running experience for the better; I became more relaxed in my running and looking up and out made running mentally easier and more interesting. Our freshman team went undefeated that season against both freshman and JV teams.

Cathy and I served at Community Bible Chapel of Richardson, Texas while I attended Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas. We led the high school ministry

under the supervision of a wonderful brother, Mark Sellers. A storm blew in the Friday night preceding the Saturday ski day I had planned for the high school group. I had recruited boats and drivers and adults to make lunch etc. Saturday morning was dry, but with patchy clouds. We arrived at the lake with two boats and one high school girl named Rheni. After waiting awhile to see if any other students would show, I was about to call the day off when Mark pulled me aside. He asked me why I was calling the day off? It seemed obvious to me – only one student had come. Mark's response forever changed my perspective. "Rheni's here. God's grace doesn't care about numbers. You give God's grace to whoever comes, whether it's 100 or 1." And so we spent the day with Rheni and had a fabulous time loving on her.

Mark's correction and instruction profoundly shaped my approach to ministry to set me free from the issue of numbers. Grace doesn't care about numbers. Minister to whoever comes whether that's one or one hundred. It has been incredibly freeing. The question is no longer "how many came" to determine if an event was successful. The right question is "did I serve those who came?"

The reason I'm sharing these stories is to make the point that there is so much to gain if we have a teachable spirit and, in contrast, there is so much to lose if we are not teachable.

The book of Proverbs puts a high premium on developing a teachable spirit. Proverbs speaks of this in terms of accepting discipline, reproof, instruction and correction. In general, these proverbs are dealing with teachableness.

Being teachable, not just being willing to learn from others, but seeking to learn from others, is a quality you need to possess if you're going to become a wise person.

Proverbs 19:20 says,

**²⁰ Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.**

The encouragement is to get in the habit of listening to advice and accepting instruction from others. If you do so, if you develop a teachable spirit now, it will lead to a lifetime of learning and gaining wisdom. Obviously, if you don't nurture a teachable spirit now the opposite will be true, you will not grow in wisdom over the course of your life.

Proverbs 15:32 says,

32 Whoever ignores instruction despises himself,
but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

An unteachable spirit thwarts personal growth and improvement. That's what it means to despise one's self. Because of his pride, the young man who would not receive our critiques of his Bible teaching thwarted the opportunity to develop his exegetical and teaching skills. His unteachableness undermined his personal growth and development. The irony is that unteachableness is most often linked to pride. Unteachableness actually keeps us ignorant and less skilled than we could be if we humbled ourselves and received instruction and correction.

The word *intelligence* translates a Hebrew word that refers to our mind, emotion and will. In other words, a teachable person gains not only intellectually but emotionally and volitionally. A teachable person *matures* in all these aspects of their lives because they welcome instruction and correction.

The best you can do for yourself is to humble yourself and not just receive instruction when it comes, but go out and get it. Whatever you are doing, find someone who is an expert in that field and pick their brains. Find trustworthy authors and read their books or listen to their podcasts. For me, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum has greatly advanced my understanding of the Scriptures. Recently I've enrolled in free online courses from Hillsdale College: the first was an analysis of World War Two and the second is a course on free market capitalism. The point is, teachableness is not a passive or static attribute but should express itself in a constant and continuous desire to learn and mature.

Proverbs 13:18 says,

18 Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction,
but whoever heeds reproof is honored.

Proverbs are not promises, nor are they formulas, but they describe life as it generally goes. In general, an unteachable spirit does not lead to a life of prosperity or respect whereas a teachable spirit does.

There is no downside to developing a teachable spirit, only positives. And there is nothing good that comes from being unteachable.

A teachable moment came very early in my ministry here at Grace. I had just come to Grace Community Church in September, 1991. In October, an elderly man died from one of our church families I hadn't met. I was unsure what to do. Cal Roy, one of our Elders, encouraged me to go visit the family saying, "People

don't so much care or remember what you say at times like these; they remember that you came and were with them." That sage advice has guided me for thirty years and I've been able to pass it along to others as well.

My brothers and sisters, nurture a teachable spirit for it will open the door to great personal growth and maturity. You won't regret being a teachable person; it will bring you blessing and honor and it will enable you to be a blessing to others as you instruct others in the ways of wisdom.